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Camille Manfredi and Michel Byrne (eds), *Bretagne-Écosse : contacts, transferts et dissonances / Brittany-Scotland: Contacts, Transfers and Dissonances*

Brest, Université de Bretagne occidentale, 2017, 356 p.

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1 The concept of a so-called "Celtic fringe" has come under assault for quite some time now, with its somewhat debatable implication of cultural homogeneity for truly varied peoples, and what is sometimes perceived as its intimations of racial purity; one need look no further than the opening pages of C. Savatier-Lahondès's contribution (§ 8) to this volume of *Scottish Studies* if one needs a reminder of some of the points raised in the discussion of the notions of "Celt" and "Celtic".[1]

2 Nevertheless, the very reason why the concept has been somewhat scorned by some in recent years, its plasticity, makes it particularly fecund for the study of phenomena crossing borders and straddling state lines; one feels it is the motivation behind the publication of the volume, *Brittany-Scotland: Contacts, Transfers and Dissonances* edited by Camille Manfredi and Michel Byrne, a collection originating from the third gathering (held in Brest in 2016) in the "Brittany and the English-speaking world" series of conferences, that includes contributions in both French and English.

3 The (for some) flimsy nature of the "Celtic" concept and the intuitive scepticism about connections other than musical between Brittany and Scotland may explain why the introductions in French and English are tinged, in either language, by an overabundance of markers of an epistemic modality leaning heavily towards the expression of doubt. One can feel how wary the authors are of the risk of making both the "Celtic fringe" and the Breton/Scottish correlation overly elastic, and not just in geographical terms, cautioning against a "celtomania that assumes an innate affinity between Brittany and Scotland, or the essentialism still often called on for ideological purposes" (p. 32), and endeavouring to move beyond the obvious parallelisms, "a tendency towards backward-looking nostalgia [...], paralyzing atavism and self-denigration" (p. 33).

4 It is the goal of the volume as a whole to demonstrate that, despite the lack of an objective historical maritime connection between Brittany and Scotland, "[t]he postulated Breton-Scottish connection is perhaps not as tenuous as one might think, being constituted by real history as well as apocryphal, contacts both longstanding and episodic and a mix of echoes and dissonances" (p. 31). And that it does, most certainly; for even if one can feel the project occasionally coming apart at the seams a little (the postscript by former First Minister Alex Salmond, for example, is certainly something of an editorial coup, but if it does contribute valuable arguments, they are somewhat peripheral to the overall perspective of the book), one is left with the assurance, after turning the last page, that the editors' initial semiconscious expression of doubt as to the tenability of the central concept was unjustified, so consistent is the vision that emerges from the tome.

5 The book is divided in four sections. The first one examines the modalities of "the invention of tradition". In this well-argued part, P. Galliou's paper on "Early-Brittany Celticness" particularly stands out, a precise and correct archeological vision of a complex notion. L. Brancaz's contribution focuses on a parallel between George IV and Napoleon III "visiting the locals" as it were (establishing common points in reception if not intention), and Rob Gibson studies "Scotland and 'the Periphery'".

6 The second part is devoted to social and cultural practices subject to transfer and adaptation in Scotland and Brittany: mythological figures, seasonal practices, language politics. L. Fossard writes about linguistic and cultural similarities between the British Isles and Brittany, A. and F. Postic trace the evolution of calendrical practices, T. Philippe deals with how "the comparison between the wrestling organisations in Scotland and Brittany [...] typify the dynamics of culture management in the Celtic context"—with the somewhat fascinating implication that politics is a combat sport and vice versa! P. Martin writes on the social, economic, political aspects of fishing regulations, and R. Barré on local authorities' attitudes on the Gallo and Scots languages.

7 The third section deals with musical acculturation and cross-pollination: S. Carney examines the pipe as symbol in different contexts, G. Goyat, "the problematic adoption of Scottish bagpipes in Brittany", P. G. L. Ahlander, how Breton musicologists inspired the arrangement and publication of Gaelic traditional songs and S. Eydman surveys the relationship between Scotland and Brittany at the *festival interceltique de Lorient*.

8 The fourth section deals with literary contacts and exchanges. B. Sellin writes about Kenneth White's Brittany, K. Lindfield-Ott about the Ossianic legacy in Jules Verne's *Rayon vert* in a particularly interesting paper, S. Noirard about World War poetry in

Brittany and Scotland, L. Tannahill about the representation of Brittany in graphic fiction, and C. de Luca about Shetland and Brittany.

9 This section ends with a fine selection of several poems and their translations; the only thing to be regretted is that the original and the rendition were not included alongside on the same page, to better showcase the merits of the derived text.

10 All in all, then, the book is a fine contribution to a field of study that one hopes will lead to further developments. Most certainly, a more grounded political (and social) perspective on Brittany might have helped problematize its core argument, beyond the mere assertion that "[o]ne might go as far as to suggest that the growing political chasm between the west of France and the rest of the Hexagon bears some resemblance to that which heralded the long process north of Hadrian Wall's towards the defining referendum of 1996" (p. 33). It could have benefitted from not shying away from the more problematic exhibitions of that "growing political chasm" with a discussion, say, of recent manifestations of Breton regionalism and its more modern symbols (does the "bonnet rouge" belong in the same category as more long-standing icons, and is there something to the "écotaxe" fiasco beyond reactionary populism?).

11 Nonetheless, the expression of a common "cognate struggle to maintain their multiple identities in the face of an increasingly urbanized and globalized culture" (p. 34) is convincing, and the editors are right to state that "[t]he academic cooperation underpinning the present collection may be seen as a concrete rejoinder to that development" (p. 34).

NOTES

1. One can, however, look further: at academic work like "Why the History of 'the Celtic Fringe' Remains Unwritten" by Steven G. Ellis (2010) at <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350748032000140778>, or more general interest material, like "DNA study shows Celts are not a unique genetic group" at <www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-31905764>, to name but two.

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Mots-clés: Camille Manfredi et Michel Byrne, Bretagne et Écosse, frange écossaise, homogénéité culturelle

Keywords: Camille Manfredi and Michel Byrne, Brittany and Scotland, Celtic fringe, cultural homogeneity

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